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The Story of Forget-Me-Not and Lily of the Valley

By MAURICE BARING.

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THERE was once upon a time a lake, and on the banks of it grew many flowers. In the spring there were snow-drops, tulips, crocuses, hyacinths, and daffodils, and in the summer, roses, sweet peas, mignonette, lilies, and pansies, and a lot of others whose names I have forgotten. They all grew on one side of the lake : but the summer flowers did not like the spring flowers, who came before them ; and the spring flowers did not like the summer flowers, who came after them. Because the spring flowers said that the summer flowers were old frumps, and the summer flowers said that the spring flowers were like a lot of noisy school children who did not know how to behave ; and they never met because the spring flowers went away before the summer flowers arrived ; but they used to talk about each other a great deal and say spiteful things about each other.

Now near the lake there lived an old green Lizard with a broken tail. He was the laziest Lizard in the world ; when he was a little boy his parents asked him if he would like to learn running or hunting or arithmetic or reading or painting in water-colours or German, and he said he would like to learn how to be lazy. So he was sent to a school which was kept by a Dormouse, who taught him how to be lazy and how to sleep all the winter and how to doze all the summer and bask in the sun and do noth-

ing at all and enjoy it; and he learnt his lesson very well, and when he left school he was the first boy in his class, and was given as a prize a little green ring, which he wore round his tail. He was a kind Lizard, and when he heard the spring flowers saying nasty things about the summer flowers, and the summer flowers saying spiteful things about the spring flowers, it made him sad, and he would have liked to make them friends, because he liked everybody to be happy together; and when there was a discussion he always agreed with everybody. So he thought about how he could make all the flowers friends, and he could think of no way, because although he was a good Lizard he wasn't clever, and he had only been taught how to be lazy, and nothing else. So he went to see the Lord Mayor, who was the cleverest man in the whole country, and told him all about it and what he wanted to do; but the Lord Mayor said it was nonsense, and that the flowers did not like each other because they were irreconcilable extremes. The Lizard did not know what this meant, and I don't either; so he went sadly away and thought to himself: "I will go and consult someone else; I will go and consult the Nightingale, because he sings so nicely." So when it grew dark and the Nightingale began to sing he went and told him all his story; but the Nightingale said, "That is very interesting, but listen to the new song I have just made up; I am going to sing it at the Royal Concert," and then he began to sing, and sang all night, and at daybreak he said, "Good-bye, Lizard, I have enjoyed myself," and he flew away to bed. The Lizard was at his wits' end what to do, and he said to himself, "I will go and ask the Mole, who is a scholar, and is sure to know"; so he went to the Mole's house underground and found the Mole writing a book with his white hands. It was called *The History of the Kings of Moleland*, and the Lizard told him his story. The Mole said it was very interesting, and then he got up, put on his spectacles, and hunted all over

his library and brought a lot of musty books, and then he read out to the Lizard the history of all the quarrels that have ever happened between moles from the beginning of the world, and "You see," he said, "they never made it up. There is nothing to be done. I have written a book on the subject of quarrels, and I will give it to you. It contains all that is known on the subject." And he did, and the Lizard went away no wiser than before, and he thought to himself, "I have been to all these clever and learned people; I will now go and ask somebody who is not clever." So he went to see the Butterfly, who was flitting about in the sun in its best clothes, doing nothing and talking nonsense to the Pinks in the garden, and he told the Butterfly his story.

"It's quite simple," the Butterfly said; "give a ball and ask them all to come to it. They're sure to come, because everybody likes going to a ball, and I will come myself and lead the cotillion, and once they are there they will make friends."

"But," said the Lizard, "that's the very first idea that came into my head."

"That's because you're an idle person like me," said the Butterfly; "only idle people have time to think right."

"But how can it be managed?" said the Lizard; "because if I give the ball in spring the summer flowers can't come; and if I give the ball in the summer the spring flowers can't come."

"You must give the ball," said the Butterfly, "on the last night of spring. Spring finishes at sunset one night in June, and summer doesn't begin till dawn; so on that night they can all meet, but, of course, all the spring flowers will have to go away punctually at dawn, or else they will die instead of going to sleep in the winter, and will never come back again."

The Lizard thought this was an excellent plan, and at once sent out invitations to the ball. When the last night of spring

arrived everything was ready, and the Lizard received his guests in a ballroom that had been specially built at the edge of the lake. It was made of bulrushes and lit up by glow-worms and fire-flies ; the band was a chorus of thrushes conducted by a blackbird, and the green woodpecker tapped on the trunk of a tree. The wasps in their smart gold liveries showed the men flowers to their cloak-room, and the dragonflies did the same for the lady flowers. The seven Miss Violets arrived first with their mother, who was a foreigner, Madame Violette de Parme, so as not to miss anything, and directly they walked into the ballroom the smell was delicious. The Miss Bluebells came giggling in, and the Pansies stayed rather shyly in a corner. Then the stately Rose arrived in her coach, which was drawn by Tiger-lilies, driven by a Peony, with a yellow Hollyhock sitting up very straight on the box and two others standing up behind. Her arrival made a great fuss, and all the spring flowers laughed, because they said it was ridiculous to give oneself such airs and pretend to be so young when one had five grown-up rosebuds : that of course the Rose had been very handsome in her day ; now she was fat, old, and ridiculous. However, the Rose took no notice ; she swept by in a long green train and a necklace and a diadem of sparkling dew-drops, and she walked straight up to the Lizard as if the room belonged to her. Then she frowned at her daughters and presented them to Prince Fleur-de-Lys, who was covered with orders, and then she sat down next to the Lords and Ladies and the Dahlias who sat along the wall watching the young people dance and enjoy themselves.

The next person to arrive was the Queen of the Annunciation Lilies. She was dressed in green and silver. " Poor thing," said the young Snowdrops, " she looks so ill and thin. Sitting up late doesn't agree with her." But the Hyacinths, who were young dandies, couldn't take their eyes off her. When the

Daffodil came tripping into the room it was the summer flowers' turn to laugh, because, they said, she wasn't young at all, and it was ridiculous at her age to pretend to be a spring flower and to behave like that. The Rose pretended not to see her, and the Lily tossed her head high up in the air and didn't even sniff.

The ball began with a quadrille. The Lizard danced with the Queen of the Lilies, and the Prince Fleur-de-Lys danced with the Rose.

After that everybody began to dance wildly.

The Snowdrops were there in a state of great excitement, because it was their first ball, and their cousins the Crocuses teased and pinched them. The Irises looked at them with contempt as if they were too much used to such things to be excited, although they had only once been to a ball before. The Misses Anemone shivered in the draught, and the Tulips in their crimson and orange tunics danced better than all the young flowers; the lovely Pink, whom everybody was in love with, sat in a corner under a mushroom and whispered to all the Tulips and the Hyacinths one after another, and the Rose looked at her and frowned, and said it wasn't fair on the Rosebuds and that she ought to be turned out; the Jessamine arrived late, so still and listless, and wandered about looking lonely and pensive, till she found the Lizard, and she talked to him during the whole evening. All the Butterflies were there, of course, and the Primroses, the Cowslips, the Wallflowers whom nobody danced with; the Tuberose, who everybody said was overdressed; Prince Gardenia—"He's not a very clever young man," the Rose said, "but he's got such a lovely place"; the Sweet Peas, who enjoyed themselves wildly; Miss Mignonette, who was mischievous and made fun of everyone; the Harebell, who danced so gracefully with the Sundew; and the Windflowers, who danced like the wind; the Jonquils, who were rather pompous and talked politics

with the Tobacco Plant ; and the Geraniums, who went down to supper and stayed there for the rest of the evening. The brigade of Larkspurs was there in their blue tunics, and their rivals, the whole regiment of Poppies, came in their scarlet uniforms, but most of them went into the cardroom and played cribbage with the Lavender, the Rosemary, and Rue, and these poor things went to sleep because the Poppies were so soporific ; and the Poppies'wives, the Cornflowers, danced with the golden ears of Wheat till they were quite out of breath.

But by far the most lovely person at the ball was little Princess Forget-me-not. She was the first of the summer flowers in this country, and did not come till June ; in some countries the Forget-me-nots come in May. She lived on the lake in a palace carved in the Water-lily all by herself, and she seldom went out because she was so lovely that the grass used to shout when she passed, and this made her feel shy. Her eyes were so blue that the sky, when he first noticed them, grew jealous, and rained without stopping for a fortnight, and he would have gone on raining had the Lord Mayor not explained to him that his conduct was not only selfish but entirely indefensible, since the fact that Princess Forget-me-not's eyes were of blue was the inevitable consequence of the intrinsic azure of his own ozone.

Princess Forget-me-not had never looked so lovely as she did this night. The Thrushes stopped singing when she came into the room, and the Geraniums rushed away from the supper-table to look at her. The spring flowers said nothing, because although the Princess was a summer flower she looked younger than the youngest Snowdrop. She was soon surrounded by all the most important flowers and butterflies in the room ; the Purple Emperor and the Red Admiral could not leave her, and the Narcissus forgot to look at himself in the glass, and the Sunflower forgot to be self-conscious, and the Heliotrope, who had been a

great beauty in her day, smiled on her approvingly. But she did not pay attention to anyone, although she was civil and amiable to everybody, because she had been very strictly brought up by an old Hornet. She gazed around the room as if she were looking for somebody, and at last her face lit up with a happy smile. In a corner of the ballroom she had caught sight of what she thought was the most beautiful person she had ever seen. It was the **Prince Lily of the Valley**, and she at once asked that he might be presented to her. He was very beautiful in his snow-white satin cloak and pale green sleeves, and on his feet were little white wings; of course they had never seen each other before, because he was a spring flower, only she had often dreamed that there must be such a person somewhere.

As for him, he fell in love with her at first sight, and they spent the rest of the evening in the conservatory, which was made of gossamer and moss, and the Maidenhair trees grew there. They were so happy, and the time flew by so quickly, that they quite forgot that the Dawn would come and that they would then have to say good-bye to each other for ever. Soon the soft sapphire sky began to get green, and the Morning Star rose and the Moon grew pale and a tiny breeze crept over the surface of the lake and ruffled it. The Rose got up in a hurry and fetched her daughters, who instead of talking to young Prince Gardenia as they had been told to do, had been sitting out all night with the Blue Butterflies. The Rose asked for her carriage to be called, and the Scarlet Runner ran to fetch it; the spring flowers all began to go away, some in carriages, others in cabs, made of walnut-shells and drawn by Field Mice, which the Bull Finch, who was the linkman, whistled for. The Lark sang "God save the King," and the Nightingale said it sang out of tune. Everybody said good-bye to the Lizard, and thanked him for the pleasant evening they had spent, and everybody went away.

“Your ball was a great success,” said the Rose as she went away, “only next time I should not ask any young married flowers.” She looked at the Pink as she said this.

“Your ball was a great success,” said the Daffodil, “but next time I should not ask any children.” She looked at the Rosebuds as she said this.

“Your ball was a great success,” said Princess Forget-me-not. “It was quite perfect.”

The Lizard was pleased, and felt that the flowers had all been happy together, and he hoped that they would stop saying spiteful things about each other. They did not, however, I am sorry to say. They went on behaving exactly as they had done before. Everybody went home.

But the Lily of the Valley and the Forget-me-not wandered down to the edge of the lake, and she hailed her boat, which was made of a leaf that fell from the apple trees of the Moon and was drawn by two Goldfishes, and they both got into it and sailed to her palace in the Water-lily. There they sat pensive and happy, looking out on to the dark water that reflected the Morning Star. In the east there was a faint lilac tinge, and the trees around the lake all shivered.

“The Dawn is coming,” said the Forget-me-not, “and you must go, or else you will fade here and never wake up again next year.”

“I can’t go,” said the Lily of the Valley, “because you are here. Although it may only last a few more minutes it is like hundreds and hundreds and thousands of years of happiness. It’s like a long summer dream. I have never seen the summer, but you are the summer.”

“I have never seen the spring,” said the Forget-me-not. “I come so early in summer that the footprints of the spring are still on the grass when I arrive, and you are the spring; the spring is

better than the summer ; the spring is glad and fresh and has winged feet like you ; the summer is sad and sultry."

"No," said the Lily of the Valley, "the spring is sad because it lives such a short time and has winged feet like me."

"Go, go," said the Forget-me-not. "In a moment the Dawn will pull aside the grey curtains with the tips of her pink fingers, and you will fade. Go, and come again next year."

"I couldn't live a whole year without you," he said.

"You will sleep," said the Forget-me-not.

"I should dream of you and be so unhappy. I will stay."

So he stayed, and they nestled close to each other in the warm gold heart of the Water-lily. And then the Dawn gently pulled away the curtains of Night, and the sky blushed, and the Morning Star flickered and went out. The Lily of the Valley never went away, and no one saw him or the Forget-me-not again ; and some people say that when the flowers had slept all through the winter and were awakened by spring the next year that there were no Lilies of the Valley beside the lake, and when summer came no Forget-me-nots, and that Forget-me-nots and Lilies of the Valley never grew any more on the bank of the lake. And other people say that the Forget-me-not and the Lily of the Valley lived happily for ever afterwards in the Water-lily, and that they had a lot of little baby Forget-me-nots and Lilies of the Valley who played by the side of the lake ; but all I know is that nobody ever saw the little Blue Princess and the White Prince again.

The Lizard told me that ; and when I asked him what had happened he said the Lily of the Valley had faded and the Forget-me-not pined away of a broken heart.

But then he is a sentimental Lizard.
